# HEARD ACROSS MONTANA

*An electronic newsletter in support of public safety services in Montana*

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## IM Weekly Highlights

- A Northern Tier microwave acceptance meeting is scheduled for Jan. 28 with Harris-Stratex.
- Harris-Stratex completed work at Fort Harrison for last-mile hops for the Montana National Guard, the FBI and the Montana Highway Patrol.
- Installation of the S. Moccasin to Garneil to Cooney microwave system is complete. All U.S. Air Force trunking sites are now connected to Malmstrom Bldg. 500. A site walk is pending.
- The High Flat to Timberline microwave upgrade is complete as well as the site walk.
- The Motorola version 7.6 upgrade is complete at all trunking sites.
- The Montana National Guard project is in the contractor's design review and approval stage, and is on schedule.

## IM Partner Announces Exciting Milestone

By Scott Bradford sbradford@mt.gov

Malmstrom Air Force Base Project Manager Dave Hinds announced at the recent IMPD meeting that the U.S. Air Force (USAF) has completed system-wide testing of its new trunking system and is using it successfully. This includes the successful utilization of microwave loop features which ensure non-interrupted connection in the event of a path problem. Hinds reported that the system is working so well the Air Force has turned off its conventional radio system.

"Air Force personnel are highly impressed with the improved wide-area coverage and voice clarity." Hinds reported.

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The IM Project is scheduled to turn on Central Consortium trunking sites in 2010. Many of these sites are shared with USAF radios and the microwave system, including the Flying J and Pacific Steel sites in Great Falls, as well as Highwood Baldy, Sullivan Hill, South Moccasin and Judith Peak.

## MACo "Interoperability Committee" Begins Work

By Ian Marquand, marquand.im@gmail.com

Just how important is the Montana Association of Counties' (MACo) new "Interoperability Committee"? Flathead County Commissioner and committee chair Joe Brenneman didn't mince words during the group's first meeting this past Wed., Jan. 13, in Helena.

"This committee's importance is hard to over-emphasize," Brenneman said. "Depending on what this committee decides, it will determine the outcome of this project."

While individual county commissioners have been involved with Interoperability Montana (IM) to varying degrees, the new panel will give IM and its efforts to build a statewide public safety radio system a higher profile within the MACo organization. In fact, as MACo Associate Director Sheryl Wood explained, the committee has full authority to make policy and/or legislative recommendations to the organization.

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Seven county commissioners serve on the committee, with Brenneman as chair and Dave Reinhardt of Valley County as vice-chair. Other members include current MACo President Carl Seilstad of Fergus County and immediate Past President Mike McGinley of Beaverhead County, as well as Greg Chilcott of Ravalli County, Mike Kilby of Musselshell County and Cynthia Johnson of Pondera County. Wednesday's kick-off meeting also drew other interested commissioners from Hill, Yellowstone and Lewis & Clark County.

IM leaders welcomed MACo's heightened interest and invited commissioners to attend IM's upcoming "Blueprint for Excellence" strategic planning session. IM Governance Committee Chair Bill Fleiner said that session will help IM create a long-term business plan that will match operational costs to potential ongoing sources of revenue. (The dates for that event have been something of a moving target, but now are tentatively set for April 12-13 in Helena.)

While money-related issues have been among counties' most persistent questions to IM,

committee members and other commissioners also want to know where ultimate control of the system will lie.

"We are at the stage of the game where we have to take local responsibility," Brenneman said. "If we have to turn this project over to a state agency, we will lose local control."

"But if we accept responsibility for this, it's a double-edged sword," said Hill County Commissioner Kathy Bessette. "We want to be involved, but don't want to get stuck with a huge bill."

"If we take responsibility, we must accept the costs," said Lewis & Clark County Commissioner Andy Hunthausen, who said IM participants should find a way to share responsibility. "Partnership is key," he said.

That statement resonated with Fleiner. "We want to make it as equitable and cost-efficient as possible," he said.

IM leaders offered to provide information and other assistance to the MACo committee as it begins its work. The committee's next meeting will be at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 21 at the Best Western Heritage Inn in Great Falls.

### IM Governance Meeting Informative
By E. Wing Spooner espooner@mt.gov

IM Governance Committee (IMGC) members held an informative meeting in Helena on Mon., Jan. 11, beginning with a report from the Sustainability Sub-Committee. Kyle Hilmer, ITSD - Policy and Planning Services Bureau, and Garrett Fawaz, Dept. of Corrections, are working on the IM Business Plan. Kerry O'Connell, Sub-Committee chair, is interested in having a draft for use at the Blue Print for Excellence training session, which has now been rescheduled to April 12 and 13. Cheri Kilby, Bylaws Sub-Committee Chair, indicated that the draft of revised bylaws needs to be ready at the same time.

Bob Murdo, Legal Council, reported on the status of the XL Heights site acquisition and progress being made on the IRS application for the IM to be recognized as a 501-C-4 organization.

Members reviewed the latest draft of the Communications Systems Planner position, which is a three-year position that is specifically funded by DHS FY09 grant funds. The following day, the IMPD decided to move forward on the hiring process. For more information about the position, please visit http://interop.mt.gov/staffing_sub-committee.mcpx.

Wing Spooner, PSSB, highlighted changes in the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP) and provided copies of last year's submission. She requested input from committee members on priorities for this year's proposal. George Gupton, WICC Project Director, was assigned to work with her on the final submission. Wing also reported on four Technical Assistance requests that were submitted to the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) last Sept. The highest priority request is to provide assistance to the City of Billings in deciding and implementing one of the radio communications options identified in its needs assessment.

Joe Brenneman, Flathead County, announced the formation and meeting details of the MACo Interoperability Committee (see related story.)

Ian Marquand, Outreach and Public Affairs Consultant, gave an update on the newest version of the IM video. Plans are to look for opportunities to air it on local community television channels. Ian also has a 13-minute version of the video for use at local service club presentations. He also reported on upcoming outreach opportunities.

The next IMGC meeting date, time and location will be announced.

## Upcoming Meetings

- **Thurs., Jan. 21**
  I-15/90 Corridor Consortium
  Butte ● 10:00 am - noon
  Chamber of Commerce, 1000 George Street
- **Mon., Jan. 25**
  IM Technical Committee (IMTC)
  Helena ● 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
  MACo Large Conference Rm., Lower Level
  2715 Skyway Drive
- **Tues., Jan. 26**
  State Agency Radio Users Task Force
  Helena ● 9:00 am - 11:00 pm
  Mitchell Building, 125 N. Roberts, Room 160
- **Wed., Jan. 27**
  Statewide Interoperable Executive Council (SIEC)
  Helena ● 10:00 am - 3:00 pm
  State Capitol, Room 152
- **Wed., Jan. 27**
  Eastern Tier Consortium
  Glendive ● 10:00 am - noon
  Location to be Announced
- **Thurs., Jan. 28**
  Big Sky 11 Consortium
  Billings ● 10:00 am - noon
  Billings Police Dept. Training Center
  4810 Midland Rd.